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ABSTRACT

A study was conducted at Miami-Dade Community College (MDCC) to determine the impact of raising the minimum grade point average (GPA) from 1.50 to 1.75. A cohort of 1,745 credit students was identified based on their end-of-term GPA for the fall term 1982. The cohort, which consisted of students who completed the term with a GPA between 1.50 and 1.75, was divided into a group that had earned 17 or fewer credits, a group that earned 18 to 33 credits, and a group with 34 or more credits. Return rates and academic progress were examined for each group. Study findings included the following: (1) of the 1,745 students enrolled in fall 1982, 65.9% returned in winter 1982, 45% in fall 1983, 38.1% in winter 1983, 29.6% in fall 1984, and 25.1% in winter 1984; (2) return rates were similar for all groups regardless of credits earned; (3) 33.7% of the students who returned for the winter 1982 term improved their GPA by the end of that semester; and (4) while all three groups registered for a substantial number of credits, only 122 students had earned a degree or certificate by the end of the winter 1984 term. The study showed that raising the GPA standard at MDCC would have a significant impact on a large number of students. MDCC's standards of academic progress are appended. (LAL)

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RAISING THE GRADE POINT AVERAGE STANDARDS AT MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: AN IMPACT STUDY

Research Report No. 85-28

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Miami-Dade Community College

RAISING THE GRADE POINT AVERAGE STANDARDS AT MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE: AN IMPACT STUDY

Research Report No. 85-28

November 1985

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Raising the Grade Point Average Standards at Miami-Dade Community College: An Impact Study

When Miami-Dade began to implement its program of educational reforms in 1978, one of the most significant outcomes directly related to the new program was the large number of students who were dismissed from the institution. Since that year, over 14,000 students have been suspended based on a combination of factors which comprise the Standards of Academic Progress (Wright, 1985). Clearly, the most important factor related to student suspension is the student's cumulative grade point average (G.P.A.). However, while the intention of the reforms program was to raise academic performance, those students who maintain even a G.P.A. of 1.50 are generally permitted to continue at Miami-Dade. It is only after 30 credits are attempted that the G.P.A. requirements change (Appendix). The purpose of the present study was to determine what the impact would be if the minimum G.P.A. were raised from 1.50 to 1.75 for all credit ranges.

In order to assess the impact, a number of questions would need to be answered. Whether or not raising the standards would result in higher academic achievement addresses the issue of educational quality. While it would be necessary to change the standards to fully assess this impact, previous research related to the reforms suggests that raising the standards would have the desired effect (Losak et al., 1981; Losak and Morris, 1983). An important economic question given the trend of declining enrollments is how many students would be lost if those with G.P.A.'s between 1.50 and 1.75 were placed on suspension. Of course, some of these students discontinue their enrollment through attrition without intervening administrative rules. On the other hand, it is important to know how many of the students in this G.P.A. range would improve their standing given the opportunity to complete subsequent course work. These are essentially the questions which were addressed by the current study.

For the analysis, a cohort of 1,745 credits students was identified based on the end-of-term grade point average for the Fall Term, 1982-83. The cohort consisted of all students who completed the term with a G.P.A. greater than 1.50 but no higher than 1.75. The cohort was divided into three groups; the first group had earned 17 or fewer credits (N=674), the second group had earned between 18 and 33 credits (N=603), and the third group completed 34 or more credits at the end of the term (N=468).

The study was designed to examine the return rate and academic progress of each group during the major terms beginning with the Winter Term, 1982-83 and ending with the Winter Term, 1984-85. In each case, the data would reveal the number of students who re-enrolled each term, the number of registered student semester credits generated by those students, and their academic performance at the end of each subsequent major term. The analysis was also designed to determine the number of students in each group who graduated from Miami-Dade during the longitudinal period. The study was not able to control for the possibility that raising the G.P.A. requirements might affect the performance of students in any direction. By making the assumption that raising academic standards would not dramatically change student behavior, the design should provide a reasonable indication of the impact that raising the G.P.A. level would have on the students as well as on the institution itself.

Results

The analysis revealed that the return rates for each of the three groups were significant and very similar, and that the number of credits registered by those students who did return was considerable. The results also indicated that there was a clear positive shift in student performance among those students in each group who did return to the institution. The data in Table 1 reflect the number of students who comprised the three groups and the return rate statistics for each of the five subsequent major

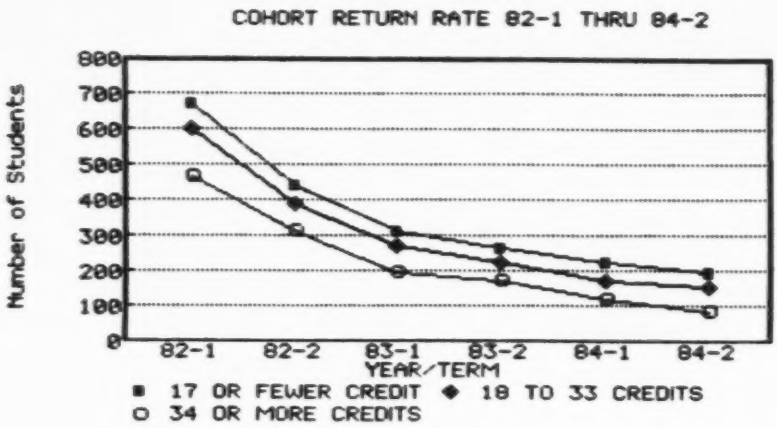
Table 1

Cohort Enrollment and Return Rate
by Group, Winter 1982-83 Through
Winter, 1984-85

	Major Terms									
	Fall 1982-83	Winter 1982-83		Fall 1983-84		Winter 1983-84		Fall 1984-85		Winter 1984-85	
Group	N	N	Rate	N	Rate	N	Rate	N	Rate	N	Rate
17 or Fewer Credits	674	445	66.0	316	46.8	268	39.7	224	33.2	197	29.2
18 to 33 Credits	603	394	65.3	274	45.0	224	37.1	172	28.5	154	25.5
34 or more	468	312	66.6	196	41.8	174	37.1	122	26.0	88	18.8
Total	1,745	1,151	65.9	786	45.0	666	38.1	518	29.6	439	25.1

terms. Figure 1 shows the return rate patterns for each of the three groups and illustrates the distinct similarity regardless of credits earned. The data indicate that about two-thirds (65.9%) of all students in the 1.50 to 1.75 G.P.A. range re-enrolled in the Winter Term, 1982-83. Forty-five percent returned the following Fall Term and in the Winter Term, 1983-84, the return rate for all three groups combined was 38.1%. Still just over one-fourth returned to the College five major semesters after the cohort had been established.

Figure 1



The data presented in Table 2 indicate the volume of registered credits for those students who returned for the five subsequent major terms. Just for the Winter Term, 1982-83, the total credits registered was well over 10,000 representing more than 250 full-time equivalent (FTE) students. For all groups combined, the total credits registered for all five major terms was 30,813 which for funding purposes translates into approximately 770 FTE students. Keep in mind that the number of credits registered by each group is at least partially accounted for by the number of students who returned in each group as reported in Table 1.

Table 2

Registered Student Semester Credits
by Major Term by Group and Total Cohort

Group	Major Term					Total
	Winter 1982-83	Fall 1983-84	Winter 1983-84	Fall 1984-85	Winter 1984-85	
17 or Fewer Credits	4,499	3,013	2,528	2,050	1,595	13,685
18 to 33 Credits	3,590	2,289	1,871	1,326	1,085	10,161
34 or More Credits	2,634	1,526	1,296	894	617	6,967
Total	10,723	6,828	5,695	4,270	3,297	30,813

Figures 2 through 5 are based on the data presented in Table 3 and show the academic performance over time for both the total cohort as well as each of the three subgroups. The graphs represent the proportion of students who either remained in the lower G.P.A. range (or fell at or below 1.50) or improved their G.P.A. standing at the end of each subsequent major term. For example, the data compiled for the total cohort (Figure 2) indicate that approximately one-third of all students who returned for the Winter Term, 1982-1983, improved their G.P.A. performance at the end of that semester. Of those who returned the following Fall Term, (83-1) 56.3% achieved a G.P.A. greater than 1.75. The improvement rates for the subsequent terms were 63% for the Winter Term, 1983-84, 72.5% for the Fall Term, 1984-85, and 73.3% for the Winter Term, 1984-85.

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Table 3

Academic Performance for Returning
Students by Major Term by Group and Total Cohort

	Major Terms									
	Winter 1982-83		Fall 1983-84		Winter 1983-84		Fall 1984-85		Winter 1984-85	
	Same or Worse	Improved	Same or Worse	Improved	Same or Worse	Improved	Same or Worse	Improved	Same or Worse	Improved
Group	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent	Percent
17 or Fewer Credits	57.3	42.7	38.9	61.1	32.1	67.9	21.4	78.6	23.9	76.1
18 to 33 Credits	71.6	28.4	43.8	56.2	37.5	62.5	31.4	68.6	25.3	74.7
34 or More Credits	72.4	27.6	51.5	48.5	43.7	56.3	32.8	67.2	35.2	64.8
Total	66.3	33.7	43.7	56.3	36.9	63.1	27.4	72.6	26.6	73.4

The group data also reveal the pronounced shift in student performance across the terms. The reader will note the most dramatic improvement for Group 1 where over 42% raised their G.P.A. standing at the end of the Winter Term, 1982-83. Keep in mind, however, that with fewer cumulative credits earned, the affect on G.P.A. is much greater when grade performance improves. In other words, it is clearly more difficult to raise the G.P.A. when it is based on a large number of credits earned; the contribution to the overall average is much reduced when new credits are earned.

Figure 2

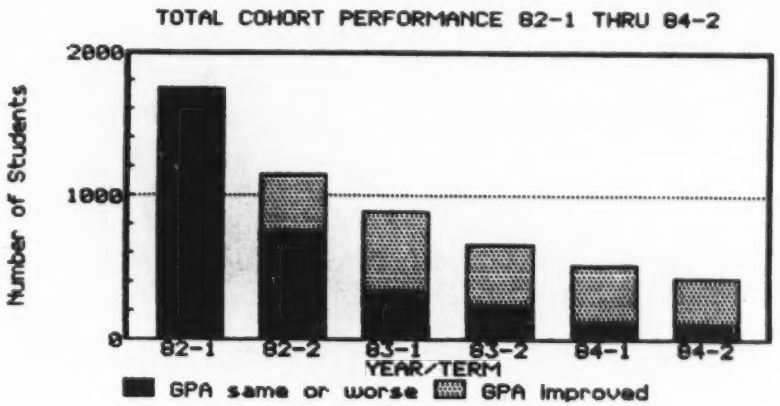


Figure 3

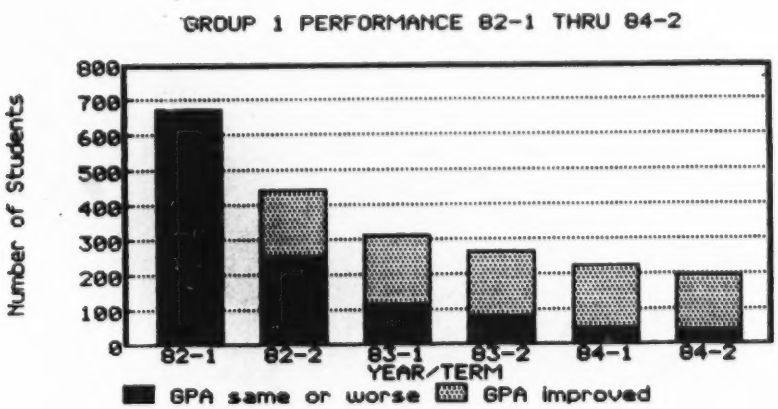


Figure 4

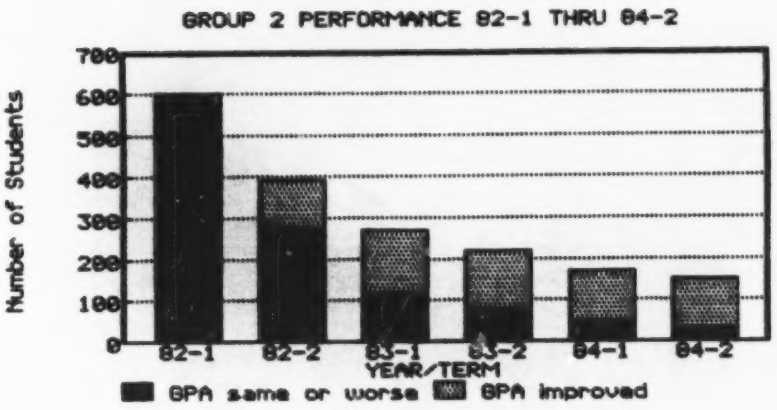
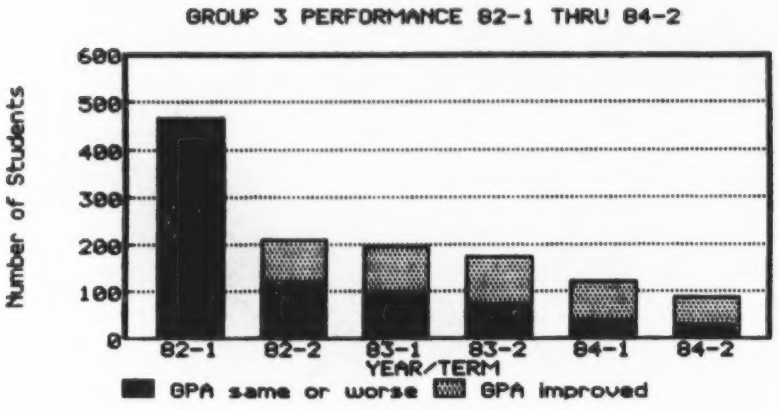


Figure 5



While the number of credits registered by each of the three groups was substantial, a match between the total cohort and the College graduation file revealed that only 122 students had earned a degree or certificate by the end of the Winter Term, 1984-85. Specifically, 22 students graduated from Group 1, 26 graduated from Group 2, and 57 from Group 3. The overall graduation rate for the cohort was just six percent. The highest rate was observed in the case of Group 3 (12.1%) as would be expected since this group had at least 34 credits earned at the time the cohort was established.

Discussion

The study clearly shows that raising the G.P.A. standard at Miami-Dade, even to 1.75, would have a significant impact on a large number of students. At a time when student enrollment is under constant scrutiny from a funding viewpoint, the potential loss of so many students through suspension would have to be weighed very carefully. While it is indeed the case that the College has foregone substantial income due to the large number of students dismissed in the past, the high return rate among students in the present study suggests that the College would not just be expediting their exit; students with G.P.A.'s between 1.50 and 1.75 do not tend to disappear on their own in great numbers.

Compared to full-time first-time-in-college students, the Fall to Winter return rate among the students in this study was very impressive (82% versus 65.9% respectively) (Morris, 1983). The average credit load for the total cohort during the Winter Term, 1982-83 was 9.31 based on the data in this study. For the same term, the College-wide average for all credit students was 9.00 (Mannchen, 1985). It is true that a fair number of students in the investigated G.P.A. range did not return to the College. However, those who did return tended to improve their academic standing in subsequent terms. And even though the graduation rate for the cohort was relatively low compared to a 19% three-year rate among full-time first-time-in-college students (Morris, 1983), the fact that academic performance was raised suggests that more graduates would eventually follow. These findings tend to support the position that students in the 1.50 to 1.75 G.P.A. range are indeed viable candidates for continuing status at the College.

The design for this study was clearly based on a "worst case" scenario; that is, the study asked what would happen if students falling within the present G.P.A. range between 1.50 and 1.75 were suspended from the institution. However, based on the present Standards of Academic Progress model, it is more likely that the students examined in the current study would be placed, at least initially, on probation. In this event, it is reasonable to expect that a probation status would not necessarily have

an adversive effect. A change of this kind would probably result in some students exceeding their present levels of academic behavior much like those observed as a consequence of the original implementation of the reforms at Miami-Dade.

References

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MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MANUAL OF PROCEDURES

TITLE	NUMBER	PAGE
STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS	4076	1 of 3
BASED ON POLICY NUMBER AND TITLE	DATE	
IV-30: STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS	August 10, 1978	

I. PURPOSE:

The main purpose for the Standards of Academic Progress is to establish a formal process through which the administration and faculty at Miami-Dade can identify and provide assistance to students who experience academic difficulty. Most students at Miami-Dade do make satisfactory academic progress. However, students who experience academic difficulty are alerted through the Standards of any academic weaknesses so that may be corrected at an early point in the student's college career.

The Standards are not intended to discourage or penalize students who are sincerely trying to make good use of the College's instructional services. Rather, the Standards reflect the commitment of the Miami-Dade faculty and administration to provide students with as much assistance as possible to ensure success in achieving their educational goals. Students have available to them a variety of means to remedy their academic weaknesses. When academic progress has not been satisfactory, the Standards require students to limit the number of credits for which they register. Special academic assistance will be provided by the College to those students. The overall objective of the Standards is to improve performance by students having academic difficulty and to increase public support for Miami-Dade's efforts to provide sound educational programs of the highest quality.

II. PROCEDURE:

ACADEMIC STANDARDS CATEGORY*	RESULT
7-16.9 credits attempted with less than a 1.5 cumulative grade point average (GPA) (GPA determined by courses completed--passed or failed)	Academic Warning
17-29.9 credits registered for but earned credit in less than half (All courses completed--passed, failed, or grades of "W")	Academic Warning
17-29.9 credits attempted with less than a 1.5 cumulative grade point average	Academic Probation
30-44.9 credits attempted with a cumulative grade point average between 1.50-1.79	Academic Probation
30-44.9 credits registered for but earned credit in less than half	Academic Probation
45+ credits attempted with a cumulative grade point average between 1.50-1.99	Academic Probation

*Effective Fall Term 1982

Revised 7-02-84

30+ credits attempted with less than a 1.5 cumulative grade point average — Academic Suspension

45+ credits registered for but earned credit in less than half — Academic Suspension

Note: In calculating the category of courses registered for but earned less than half, incomplete grades (I) and audit grades (X) will not be calculated.

DEFINITIONS: STANDARDS OF ACADEMIC PROGRESS RESULTS

Academic Warning signifies there will be a limitation of 9 credits in the Fall Term, 9 credits in the Winter Term, 3 credits in the Spring Term and 3 credits in the Summer Term. In addition, students should take 3 or more credits as part of a prescribed program of intervention which attempts to assist them. This program of intervention may include developmental studies, a study skills course, career counseling or a combination of all three.

Academic probation signifies there will be a limitation of 9 credits in the Fall Term, 9 credits in the Winter Term, 3 credits in the Spring Term and 3 credits in the Summer Term. As part of the credit limitation, students should have 3 or more credits prescribed as part of a program of intervention.

Academic suspension requires students to discontinue enrollment at Miami-Dade through the next major term. (Neither the Spring Term, nor the Summer Term, nor the combination of both is considered a major term.)

Note: Students eligible for academic suspension based on their cumulative record who earn at least half of their credits each term and maintain a 2.0 term grade point average will be permitted to continue to register on Academic Probation.

Students eligible for academic suspension based on their cumulative record who had a Clear status the previous term will be placed on Academic Probation with a Suspension Alert message.

Probation after suspension Students who discontinue their enrollment because of suspension during a major term may re-enter the College and continue for each subsequent term of enrollment, provided they maintain a 2.0 term grade point average and earn credit in at least half the credits for which they register.

Academic dismissal represents a separation of students from Miami-Dade Community College for at least twelve months. Academic dismissal occurs after students fail to meet the minimum requirements during probation after suspension. If,

MIAMI-DADE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

MANUAL OF PROCEDURES

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after being readmitted following suspension, students fail to meet minimum standards, which are maintaining a 2.0 term grade point average and earning credit in at least half the courses for which they are registered, they will be separated from the College.

Students are eligible to apply for re-admission to the College after the dismissal period. Admission will be on a petition basis. In order for re-admission to be approved, the petition must present evidence of some change in the student's circumstances.

ADMINISTRATIVE REVIEW

Students who reach 30 credits with less than half their credits earned or with less than a 2.0 grade point average will be subject to a special administrative review. If their academic record reflects unusual conditions of academic difficulty, their status under the Standards of Academic Progress may be administratively adjusted.

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